LOCAL WORK GROUP

FAIRA requires the formation of a Local Work Group. Members will include the NRCS, RCDs, FSA, County Committee, Farm Bureau, UC Cooperative Extension, Fish & Game, Regional Water Quality Control Boards, California Department of Forestry and other agencies and organizations.

WHAT ABOUT OTHER AREAS IN CALIFORNIA?

In the old ACP program, each county received a financial base. Under EQIP, each county must compete statewide for funding.

HEL

Farmers still need Highly Erodible Land (HEL) determinations for annually planted commodity crops. If land is HEL, a Conservation Compliance Plan must be developed and implemented. We have 25 plans in Sonoma and Marin Counties.

WETLANDS

There is increased flexibility in wetland mitigation for USDA benefits. (Note: Corps still must be consulted for Clean Water Act.) Additionally, those with vineyards must get wetland determinations from NRCS to participate in USDA programs.

WILDLIFE HABITAT INCENTIVES PROGRAM (WHIP)

This new program appears to be a good fit for this area. The Local Work Group will convene to explore this program and develop criteria for Sonoma and Marin Counties. The Local Work Group will meet develop criteria and identify local fish and wildlife habitat priority areas. The cost-share rate is up to 75% of approved practices, with a maximum of $5000 over a 5 year contract. A sign-up period will be announced, possibly in March.

WETLAND RESERVE PROGRAM

A permanent or 30 year easement for returning agricultural land to wetlands. Projects are ranked on a statewide basis. Maximum cap is $2000/acres. Sign-up is continuous, and began October 1, 1996.

FARMLAND PROTECTION PROGRAM (FPP)

This is a 6 year program with a cap of $35 M for the life of the program. For FY96, $14.5M is available. Remaining years distribution will be $2 M. The goal is enrollment of 170,000 to 340,000 acres in agricultural easements. FPP provides a maximum of 50% funds for each easement, therefore, the state must have an existing farmland protection program. Conservation Plans are required on accepted parcels. 18 states are eligible. California has 13 pending offers, with 2 from Marin County (working with MALT), and 3 from Sonoma County (working with SCAPOSD &/or Landwright)

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1996 FARM BILL HIGHLIGHTS
for Sonoma, Marin, & Napa Counties

FAIRA - The 1996 Farm Bill is called the Federal Agricultural Improvement and Reform Act.

PRIORITY AREAS (Must be approved at Washington)
Geographic Priority Areas for Marin/Sonoma/Napa
> #7   Dairy/Range Watershed Projects
> #17 Napa River
> #19 Russian River

Natural Resource Priority Areas for California
> #2   Range and Forestry Issues
> #3   Bay Delta
> #6   Salmon/Steelhead

LARGE LIVESTOCK FACILITY
The NRCS State Conservationist, in consultation with the State Technical Committee will define a large confined livestock operation based on criteria developed for the state. (Note: The State Technical Committee consists of agencies and organizations. Farm Bureau, Cattlemen's, Woolgrowers, as well as Western United Dairymen are represented).

ACP is history.

EQIP--Environmental Quality Improvement Program
This new program incorporates many aspects of ACP. Many producers participated in the Long Term Agreements (LTA), and EQIP is most similar to the LTAs. Briefly, EQIP is a 5 to 10 year contract. The projects to be cost-shared are NRCS practices, as in the past. The maximum amount per cost-share is $10,000 per year, and $50,000 per contract. A Conservation Plan will be developed with the landowner. A sign up period will be announced.

FOR EXAMPLE...
A livestock producer wants to limit livestock to the creek. There can be three years of building fence and planting riparian vegetation, and 5 years of range management of the area.

A second example is a grape grower who has a hillside vineyard, over 5 years old, who wants to repair a gulley. There can be one year of gulley repair, and 4 years of management of the area.

NEXT STEP FOR EQIP
As soon as we hear if our EQIP Geographic Priority Areas are approved, the Local Work Group will convene to develop a ranking system for applications using natural resource criteria.